

History of linguistics:

William Mandeville AUSTIN (1914-1971)

Pierre-François PUECH et Bernard PUECH

William Mandeville AUSTIN Jr. was an American professor whose research focuses on the language by its cultural meanings and practices, a resource for the study of societies. W. M. Austin directed the series of Spoken Language Dictionaries and inaugurated, at Illinois Tech, a new doctoral program in linguistics. Bill Austin said: if you know Latin, you're educated; if you know Greek, you're cultured; if you know Sanskrit, you're learned; if you know an American Indian language, you're scientific (unless you're an American Indian).



Early life and education. W. M. Austin ("Bill") born in Philadelphia, Jan. 31, 1914, was the son of William Mandeville Austin (1886-1925) engaged in the rise of educational phonograph culture through the Student Educational Records Inc. He grew up at Lakewood N.J. and was Stinnecke Scholar in classics through seven years at Princeton. In 1938, he received his Ph.D. from Princeton where he explored links between the disciplines of linguistics, anthropology and mathematics with the help of the stimulating atmosphere of class friends: Henry Lee Smith, René Puech, Jean Marie Delfosse and Richard Hofstadter. He later joined a serious concern with mathematics and research in machine translation.

Career. During the World War II, W. M. Austin was one of the linguists the army called to prepare language guides and military phrasebooks and also to set up a series of intensive courses in many languages*. The approach was to learn many sentences with limited words in their natural environments. The student could, by this way, quickly learn the language "like a native". He was in the Information and Education Division of the US Army with Henry Lee Smith ("Haxie") and Raven I. McDavid, where he developed the Army method of language instruction with the use of phonograph records. After the

war, W. M. Austin taught in Yale, NYU, and joined in the fall of 1948 the research group for Mongolian, at the Johns Hopkins under Owen Lattimore, former advisor to Chiang Kai-shek. Transferred to Georgetown, Temple, in 1961 he had become a research associate at Eastern Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute, renewing an interest he had had since before World War II and, professor in 1962 at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Austin was member of the Linguistic Society of America, the Institute of Languages and Linguistics and, finally in 1971, was a co founder of the History of American Linguistics.

References:

- 1 Princeton Alumni Weekly 1925, Sept. 30, vol.26 page 98.
- 2 McDavid Raven I. Jr. 1972 "William M. Austin 1914-1971" Journal of the American Oriental Society. 92,1: 196. DOI: 10.2307/599722
- 3 McDavid Raven I. Jr. 1980. Linguistics, through the Kitchen Door,in "First Person Singular: Papers from the Conference on an Oral Archive for the History of American Linguistics", Davis B.H. and O'Cain R.K. eds. University of South-Carolina, Columbia S.C., John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam.
- <http://hum.uchicago.edu/faculty/goldsmith/HistoryPhonology/1stPersonSingular.pdf>
- 4 Princeton Alumni Weekly 1971, Dec. 14, vol. 72 page 19.

*Appendix: Linguists in the Army Language Section, 165 Broadway, New York City. The work began in Washington and continued in New York, under the leadership of Henry Lee Smith Jr. with William M. Austin, William J. Gedney, Raven I. McDavid, John Kepke, Clarence L. Barnhart, Morris Swadesh, Charles Francis Hockett, Allen Walker Read, Fred W. Householder, Robert A. Hall, Jr., Edward Artin, Maxim Newmark, Naomi Pekmezian, Herbert Penzl, Madison Beeler, Phyllis Jones (Nixon),J. Allan Pfeffer, Paul Benedict, Edward Kennard, Vincenzo Cioffari, Jeannette Dearden (Denning), Fred Lukoff, Amelia Susman, Betty Gardner, Paul Garvin, Norman McQuown, Donald Swanson, Stanley Newman, Ralph Weiman. Associated linguists not in the table of organization: J Milton Cowan (ACLS), Leonard Bloomfield, William G. Moulton ,George L. Trager.

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